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# Some insights into the approaches to selecting potential candidates to become student teacher

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## Abstract

The present paper focuses on the discussion of a set of data resulted from a research carried out by The European Network on Teacher Education Policies (ENTEP) on the subject of teacher recruitment. The survey covered the policies aimed at attracting new teachers to join the profession, and the means used to select suitable people to train to be teachers. The answers are still to be summarized in an overview report, with individual country annexes, to be published on the ENTEP website. The area we refer to in the article is that of *Approaches to selecting potential candidates to become student teachers*.

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## 1. General framework of analysis

The shared conclusions of the Council and of the Governments' Representatives of the Member States (15 November 2007) on improving the quality of teacher education stressed the need to make the teaching profession a more attractive career choice, to improve the quality of teacher education and to pay attention to initial education, early career support (induction) and further professional development of teachers. National strategies should be focused on the development of policies that are coordinated, coherent, adequately resourced and quality assured.

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Teachers should have sufficient incentives throughout their careers to review their learning needs and to acquire new knowledge, skills and competence.

Concerning specifically the competences of teachers, Ministers have recognised that: *"The knowledge, skills and commitment of teachers, as well as the quality of school leadership, are the most important factors in achieving high quality educational outcomes. ... For this reason, it is essential ... to ensure that those recruited to teaching and school leadership posts are of the highest calibre and well-suited to the tasks they have to fulfil ..."* (European Union, 2009).

EU Member States and the European Commission strengthened co-operation in 2009 with a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ("ET 2020"), a follow-up to the earlier Education and Training 2010 work programme launched in 2001. As regards the subject of the present paper, this framework acknowledges the need to ensure high quality teaching as it has become to be recognized as one of the key objectives of the European and national policies that might support the improvement and quality of educational systems. The framework underlines the importance to provide adequate initial teacher education, continuous professional development for teachers, and to make teaching an attractive career-choice.

The importance of providing adequate initial and continuous teacher education led to the development of a Network whose main purpose is to promote co-operation among EU Member States regarding their teacher education policies in relation to initial, in-service and continuous professional development programmes. Therefore, The European Network on Teacher Education Policies (ENTEP) was formally launched at an international conference under the Portuguese Presidency, held in Loulé (Algarve) on May 22-23, 2000.

Moreover, Ministers of Education of twenty European Union Member States (Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, The Netherlands and the United Kingdom) and the European Commission joined this initiative and appointed their representatives. Bulgaria and France were also invited to join the network, but they haven't still appointed a representative, while Slovak Republic and Italy are inactive. Romania joined ENTEP in 2007 and is represented by Romiță Iucu (currently ENTEP president).

ENTEP develops its activities in the field of teacher education policies, but it is neither a decision group nor an expert group. It is an advisory group or reference group that acts as a sounding board for the European Commission and individual member states. The group has a wide range of expertise and professional experience and acts at both of the following levels: (1) at the *European level* where it: promotes the exchange of information about recent issues, trends and policies in the European Union Member States for mutual inspiration; addresses issues of common concern; works on the construction of convergences; participates in on-going community work and (2) within the *Member States* where it: contributes to a European perspective of the debate on teacher education policies; contributes to policy and decision-making concerning teacher education policies.

## 2. Research

ITT represents a system with major impact on the development of the pre-university and higher education as their direct outcomes, the graduates, are crucial for the development of the whole society. Consequently, in a society, which grows in complexity and exigencies, teachers' training should play an essential role in the strategy of any knowledge-based economy.

This is how we can explain the major focus of the European countries in the last years on reforming the educational systems, based on international collaboration, recommendations, declarations and common decisions, harmonisation of legislation and best practices as far as the measures for improving the quality of education are concerned as a premise of socio-economic progress.

Any reform should start and end with the revaluation of the teachers' training system, the first component being the ITT. In this first phase, the core competences of the professional profile are developed, those competences necessary to address the professional roles and tasks which are continuously changing.

The present article is based on a survey designed by the England's ENTEP representative, Michael Day, in 2011, and was released among all representatives. The ENTEP Survey of Teacher Recruitment consists of 31 questions, including both open and closed questions, divided in four specific areas of study: (1) *Approaches to selecting potential candidates to become student teachers*, (2) *Approaches to selecting teachers for employment*, (3) *Policies*

aimed at attracting people to train to become teachers, (4) *Success criteria*. The research undertaken provides significance to some common international preoccupations and actions/initiatives aiming to concentrate on the teaching career because it brings to our attention the need to focus on its increase in the attractiveness and the exigencies imposed by an authentic professional development.

In the present paper we should consider only the answers in relation to the first area of study.

Members were asked to describe current practice and also any plans to change procedures. The questions were designed to allow members to enter free text rather than structured answers into boxes.

The survey covered the policies aimed at attracting new teachers to join the profession, and the means used to select suitable people to train to be teachers. The answers are still to be summarized in an overview report, with individual country annexes, to be published on the ENTEP website. They will be available for colleagues to draw on for comparison with wider international examples.

The aim of the survey was to allow comparison by ENTEP members of the procedures used in their countries to recruit teachers into the profession.

### 3. Discussion of results

The questions subordinated to the area of study *Approaches to selecting potential candidates to become student teachers* were related to the institutions responsible for selecting student teachers, to the procedures employed, to the selection techniques and to the tools being used, to the legal framework for selecting candidates and possible occupational profile in relation to the European perspective, and Recommendations and Conclusions on the Improvement of the Quality of teacher Education, as well as to the mobility in this area of interest.

#### 3.1. Responsible institutions for selecting student teachers

Across ENTEP countries, the prevailing institutions involved in selecting student teachers are the universities or the ITT providers (sometimes the latter being in fact also institutions of higher education). Exceptions are Cyprus where candidates should pass an exam managed by the central government, Germany and Luxembourg where after a first phase of selection undertaken by universities, the second phase involves some national exams and Flanders where there is no selection in place. From the data collected we can also infer that initial teacher education trends towards a Bachelor-Degree as minimum qualification.

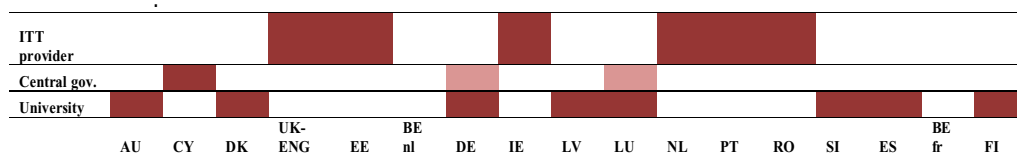


Fig. 1. Institutions responsible for selecting student teachers

#### 3.2. Procedures employed for selecting student teachers

In close relationship to this point, the data show us that in most of the ENTEP countries there are no standardized procedures used either nationally or locally. However we can find some exceptions: Cyprus, Denmark, Ireland, Slovenia, Finland, and to a certain extent Spain that are using standardized procedures. When referring to the variation of procedures for different routes into teaching, there can be identified some differences: especially if discussing the undergraduate and postgraduate training courses as the latter seem to be a little more demanding and sometimes they depend upon the undergrad – England, Estonia, Ireland, Slovenia, Romania. There are some different routes for pre-primary and primary students as compared to the secondary teachers. There are cases when depending of the type of education the student teachers are preparing for; there are some variations in the procedures (pre-primary and primary teachers vs. secondary education teachers or lower secondary teachers vs. higher secondary teachers who require is in a majority of countries a master's degree).

Within this research self-selection and the tools for self-evaluation were taken into consideration as points of interest that have not usually been included in other reports on the subject. The variation in their case usually appears between the countries in which self-selection and self-evaluation play no role what so ever (Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Spain) and those who consider that self-selection and self-evaluation are quite important being thus encouraged, sometimes the candidates can benefit of some tools that support them into this process (Austria, England, Germany, The Netherlands, Portugal, Romania). A notable exception is Flanders where self-selection is the only procedure in place. The rest of the countries did not answer to this question.

### 3.3. Selecting techniques – a possible way of identifying student's teaching potential

Regarding the techniques used by the different institution responsible for selecting student teachers, written examinations are used by one third of the institutions, mainly used in Preschool and Primary School Teacher Training Departments.

Psychometric testing is not in use among the ENTEP member stated except of England where this system is being piloted. Finland uses psychometric tests but not as an initial selection procedure, because psychometric testing is included in the training programme, and its role is that of evaluating student's performance after completing a first stage on their initial teacher training.

Key skills testing are used for mainly on Preschool and Primary School Teacher Training Departments or for fine arts or sport departments, and generally target the evaluation of speech or rhythm.

In the term of competence level checking are being undertaken through qualification checks or by evaluating the application forms. In some countries, such as The Netherlands competence level checks are part of the training programme, where all bachelor students of education in primary schools are obligated to pass tests on language and arithmetic in order to continue their education. In Slovenia, for example, competence level checks are not used, where as in Romania competence level checking is under construction according to the new Law of National Education.

As for, using sample lesson/observation of teaching or working with a group of pupils as a selection technique, six out of eighteen member states involved in this present research are in favour of using this type of examination. Micro teaching exercise are use both before and after qualification, whereas attending to sample lesson at all levels, observation of work with pupils during training programme are available only after the teacher has passed the exam.

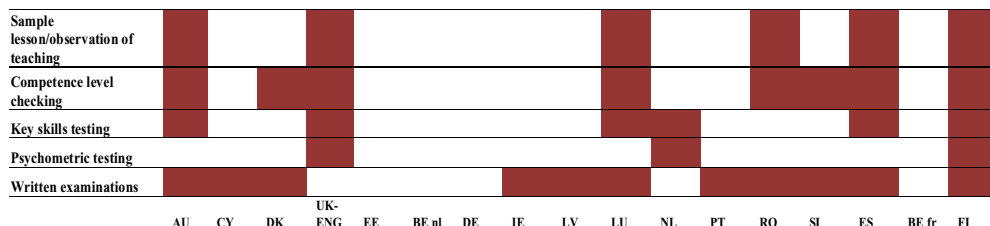


Fig. 2. Approaches to selecting potential candidates - to become student teachers

Regarding the way in which these selection instruments are financed there can be identified two situations – one in which these instruments are financed either by the university or the ITT provider (Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, Portugal, Slovenia, Finland) and the second in which there is a combined responsibility of financial support for this instruments shared between the university/ITT provider and the central government (England, The Netherlands, Romania, Spain). However we can identify two special cases, Flanders where the students finance the selection instruments and Cyprus where the finance is ensured by student and the ITT provider. Of course it is important also to know in what degree these instruments have been evaluated in their turn. The apparent trend is that they have not been evaluated yet or they are underway (Austria partially, Denmark, Estonia, Flanders, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, French Community

of Belgium, Finland). A notable exception is Austria partially in the case of the University College of Teacher Education, which trains teachers for the initial education of primary school teachers, secondary school teachers (i.e. lower secondary), for vocational school teachers and for poly-technical school teachers. Cyprus and England did not respond to this question.

Regarding the legal framework for candidates' selection all countries except for The Netherlands answered positive to this question. In the same line of legal provisions, the question on the subject of occupational profile or a list of competences and/or standards defined either at national or local level positioned the ENTEP countries on different positions: in most cases they are defined at the level of central government (England, Estonia, Flanders, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, French Community of Belgium), in other cases the universities/ITT providers either together with the central government (Austria and Finland) or alone (Cyprus) are being involved. In Romania, the process of defining the occupational profile or the set of competences is on the way (in the present this profile is in place). Depending on the moment in time this occupational profile or set of competences were established they are in line with the European perspective, and Recommendations and Conclusions on the Improvement of the Quality of teacher Education or not being considered some revisions. The representatives of Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and Spain answered a definitive Yes, as the profile developed is in line with the European enterprises. In the case of Austria, Germany the answers were more moderate in the sense that they only referred to a more general relationship. For Flanders, The Netherlands the development is older and current trends have not been included. A definite No came from England and the French Community of Belgium, while Finland did not answer to this question.

The last question from this section refers to the mobility. In this case most countries have policy measures in place for implementing the Lifelong Learning Programme of the EU (LLP) – Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, England, Ireland, Latvia, Portugal, Romania and Slovenia. There are also some cases in which mobility does not receive major focus or even it is discouraged because of the occupational standards – Flanders and Netherlands. Estonia and the French Community of Belgium did not answer to this question. There were also some atypical answers – Germany for which is easier to be mobile in EU rather than in Germany, Luxembourg which underlined that 90% ITE students are mobile, Spain where are given grants to study abroad (part of ITE course) and Finland which answered that it varies.

#### 4. General conclusions and recommendations

The increasing demands for highly qualitative educational systems on one side and the risk of not having enough appropriately qualified teachers combined with the relatively low status of the profession are among the challenging confronting most of the educational systems today. Also the different pace in the development of the educational systems including the teacher training component, as well as the specific social, economic, cultural conditions features of different regions or countries in particular add extra weight in the process of initiating equalizing policies in the field. However, common trends can be identified as shown in the previous section as well as fundamental principles that may support joint actions aiming at selecting the best prospective teachers.

However, a set of trends, which should be further analysed against different criteria, seems to get shape:

- Decentralization of responsibility at the level of university/ITT provider at least in what the selection of candidates to student teachers is concerned. *It would be interesting to investigate whether this decentralization is in line with a decentralization of the curriculum.*
- Admission to initial teacher education translates into quite a specific question: how do you identify the best students, convince them of the importance of this profession for society, and devise efficient and equal recruitment procedures for all students? At present admission seems to be governed more by general entrance requirements for tertiary education than by more specific selection criteria for teacher education. There is a relatively small number of ENTEP countries in which prospective students are actually rejected due to specific selection criteria. However, there are some selection methods in place and which are more rigorous for the prospective teachers who want to work in primary and pre-school education. Aptitude tests or interviews about the candidate's motivation to become a teacher are not administered in many countries. Consequently this situation raises at least two issues that further studies should look into:

- In the countries with more open entry to ITT, the main filter to entering the teaching profession seems to be at the stage of applying for a teaching post, once qualified. In the countries where a most significant filter/selection procedure is in place at the stage of selection to enrol on an initial teacher education they tend to have looser procedures when entering the teaching profession. In those countries, the numbers entering ITE may in some way be matched to the demand for teachers. *Which are the costs of the social and educational systems in each of these cases, the variables that determine one option or another and the impact of these models?*
- Referring to the evaluation of instruments and to the issue of attracting the best students “for the job” *should the instruments for recruiting be standardized or at least evaluated against a set of specific criteria? And in what degree an increase in the difficulty of recruitment exams would lead to a degree of increasing the professional status?*

These are only some general conclusions that the analysis of the data at hand allowed us to draw on the specific subject of selecting potential candidates to become student teachers. They might represent a starting point in defining new policies in the field.

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